

Circular No. 140

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THE LIE OF THE WILD OATS.

ISSUED BY THE STATE BOARD OF HEALTH OF MAINE.

The belief is quite general that every youth of stamina "must sow his wild oats." Some go so far as to say that he cannot amount to anything unless he does sow more or less of them. Many women have been heard to say that penitent *roues* make the best husbands, not recognizing the fact that where one man is strong enough to overcome his evil experiences, a hundred are wrecked, morally and physically.

That the average young man sows more or less wild oats is indisputable. That the more substantial and manly men are often the ones who have paid particular attention to their sowing is true. That some men who never sowed any were not much to begin with, is also true. If fear or lack of animality, had not been more prominent in such men than in their erring brothers, they would have joined their ranks. That some "goody goody" young men, who never have been tempted, fall into evil ways later in life cannot be denied. That penitents often make good husbands is a matter of common observation; whether they have been scared into good behavior or have simply matured in judgment matters not. On the other hand, many young men who might have been ornaments to society have been ruined for life by wild oat sowing. That any youth is better for wild oat sowing, save where its terrible results bring a naturally weak and vacillating character to his senses through mental shock, is false. "Boys will be boys," they say. Yes, and dogs will be dogs; but this does not lessen the deadliness of hydrophobia. The wild oats doctrine was probably invented by some fake social philosopher, who had sins of his own to apologize for and no diseases acquired by early indiscretions to modify his opinions.

Almost every boy at some time in his life is taught by his elders the Lie of the Wild Oats. His father and grandfather learned it before him and followed where it led. The man who escapes its dangers does so by great good luck, or by virtue of a strong organization, moral, mental and physical, that nothing can shake. That any man who sows can altogether escape reaping is a fallacy. Physical, mental or moral scars remain, and while the world may be satisfied with him, he is never satisfied with himself. Man's sexual lapses in afterlife are often

due to his chasing some mental will-o'-the-wisp; some youthful experience which, like the circus of his boyhood, seems ideal.

Impressions made upon the highly sensitive sexual brain centers of youth at a period when the emotional organization is especially impressionable leave a memory that overshadows all its future life as a false ideal—an ideal which is merely a reflex from a mental scar that will never fade nor become dulled in sensitiveness so long as physical sexual capacity remains unimpaired.

Should youth be exposed to debauchery to strengthen it? Most emphatically no! If youth were protected from wild oats influences until its judgment was mature, there would not be so many brands to be plucked from the burning. For the benefit of those who accept the "wild oats" conception of the male ideal, here are a few pictures that are only too familiar:

Picture 1. A certain health resort—the sink-hole into which a large part of the immorality, crime and disease of America is dumped—there are a hundred thousand visitors annually. Of these, a large proportion go there to harvest their "wild oats" crop. He who visits one of the government "rifle holes" can best appreciate the harvest of the "wild oats."

Picture 2. A hospital. Here is a group of locomotor ataxics; there a group of deformed children; yonder, a girl in her teens is nursing a child who never will know its father. More "wild oats."

Picture 3. An asylum. Here is a case of general paresis; there a melancholiac; in the next room a maniac can be heard shrieking. "Wild oats" aplenty.

Picture 4. A police court; full of drunks, criminals and bums. "Wild oats" again.

Picture 5. A jail. Here are "wild oats" of the striped, short-haired variety in abundance.

Picture 6. A foundling asylum full of children cursed by society before they were born as "bastards." Poor little "wild oats!"

Picture 7. A doctor's office, full of anxious men and still more anxious women, who do not gossip much about their ailments, even among their intimates, save where the women are told by the doctor a pretty little fairy tale for home use. "Wild oats" growing in the dark.

Picture 8. A brothel. Around the "reception" room sits a collection of poor female creatures, many of whom were originally sacrificed in aiding youth to sow its "wild oats."

These women are now getting poetic revenge, as the doctor knows.

Picture 9. A beautiful girl is found dead in the river one fine morning. What is she doing there? Washing the "wild oats" out of her life.

Picture 10. A pistol shot rings out in a gambling hell—a man falls dead. The gun was loaded with "wild oats."

Picture 11. A defaulting bank cashier flees to Canada; he is looking for a market for his "wild oats."

Picture 12. A series of deserted babies are found in the snow. Who planted them there? Sowers of "wild oats."

Picture 13. A wife, surrounded by her cold and hungry children is sitting weeping—eating her heart out. The husband and father is on a drunk; he has whipped her, is in jail, or has deserted her. "Wild oats" make broken hearts; they are poor food for babies; they do not buy coal, nor cover nakedness.

We doctors know the wild oats crop under numerous terms. Crime, inebriety, syphilis, paresis, locomotor ataxia and gonorrhea are chief among them. What the consultation room does not tell us the operating table does. Youths would better look at the specimens of disease taken by the surgeon from innocent wives, and see how they tally with the "wild oats" of some husbands' youth before they begin sowing their own.

There are thousands of syphilitics and tens of thousands of gonorrheics in every large city in the world. Add to these the other wild oats products, crime, pauperism, prostitution, inebriety and insanity—all the conditions of degeneracy—and we can never offset the frightful record with an occasional brand plucked from the burning or with the "burnt child who dreads the fire."

The Lie of the Wild Oats is based upon the misapplication of the theory of a separate standard for men and women. The young man may sow his wild oats, but the young woman must not. The sowing of the wild oats by the one, however, necessitates the co-operation of the other. What made the thousands of prostitutes in every great city; What supports them? What keeps the supply equal to the demand? Largely "wild oats." Wherever immorality, vice, disease, crime, drunkenness and insanity most thrive, there, if we dig down to the very root of these evils, we find "wild oats" the thickest.

The maimed gray-beards who learned the wild oats lie from society's primer are usually willing to confess that the "wild oats" of yesterday are watered with the tears of to-day. The vicious roots of the "wild oats" of youth often lie deep in

the ashes of manhood's and womanhood's despair. The crop is garnered with the sickle of regret and threshed with the flail of disease and pain.

The importance of the study of the venereal diseases is tremendous. The importance of their relations to the social body cannot be overestimated. Gonorrhea and syphilis are the chief causes of "race suicide." The cost to society of the venereal diseases is frightful.

Gonorrhea is probably the most frequent disease experienced by the adult male human being. This disease permanently cripples one in one hundred of the population and kills one in two hundred.

Twenty to thirty per cent of blindness is due to gonorrhea. It once was eighty per cent, but the modern methods of handling the new-born infant have reduced the percentage.

It has been estimated that seventy to eighty-five per cent. of the women operated on for abdominal and pelvic disease in our hospitals are brought to the operating table by gonorrhea.

"Syphilis is responsible for an asserted ninety per cent. of locomotor ataxia, a large per cent. of insanity, for a great number of still-born children and for a heavy percentage of premature deaths of children, for apoplexy, paralysis and sudden death long after the disease was supposed to have been eliminated. Insurance actuaries hold that on the average syphilis shortens life one-third."

Briefly: With the exception of syphilis, the germs of venereal diseases originate in unclean women. As syphilis is frightful in its ravages and is most often conveyed by prostitutes, the source of the original germ is not an important matter for argument. As all prostitutes are of necessity unclean, the moral is not far to seek.

Aside from moral and esthetic considerations, there is no way that contact with prostitutes can be made safe.

Let the young man or boy in search of illicit sexual adventure remember this: It is practically impossible for a prostitute to ply her trade for even a few months without developing venereal disease. Once she contracts disease she begins scattering the germs throughout the community by infecting all of her patrons, one after the other.

Another point to be remembered is this: A woman may transmit disease without herself having it. The germs of the disease are transmitted to her by some diseased male, and by her communicated to a subsequent patron.

Quacks work in concert—victims are passed on from one to another. Most of the quack offices are incorporated under one management. When the victim's stock of confidence in one quack becomes exhausted, either a new quack is called in to "cap" the game, or the patient is passed on to the next quack shop.

The "re-fee" man is a recognized appendage of the quack system. He is a clever, persuasive rascal who goes about from one syndicate shop to another, "re-feeing" cases of poor fellows whose lack of common sense almost prohibits sympathy. And it is lucrative. The operations of one "re-fee" man in Chicago are said to have been \$15,000 in one week, from a single "office." The "re-fee" man certainly has mastered the art of "getting blood out of a turnip."

If the laity ever becomes intelligent enough to understand that an alleged guarantee is alone sufficient to stamp the quack as a scoundrel, quackery will be put out of business.

This circular is a reproduction of the third chapter and a few other paragraphs of "Sex Hygiene for the Male and What to Say to the Boy," a book for physicians, teachers and parents. Through the courtesy of the author, Dr. G. Frank Lydston of Chicago, and the publishers, the Riverton Press, of the same city, the State Board is permitted to make this reprint.